thetech.com

Volume 139, Number 2

WEATHER, p. 2 FRI: 52°F | 32°F Showers SAT: 40°F | 22°F Mostly Sunny

Thursday, February 14, 2019



The MIT Spinning Arts Club performs the final act of their North Court Winter Show Feb. 6.

# BC scheduled to be closed for 'renewal' starting June 2020 Students must move out during construction, dorm

expected to reopen under Tier 1 pricing Aug. 2022

By Jessica Shi EDITOR IN CHIEF

Burton Conner will be the next MIT residence hall to undergo "renewal," according to an email from administrators and house leaders sent to BC residents Wednesday night.

To accommodate the process, BC is scheduled to "go offline" after Commencement 2020, the email said. The targeted completion and reopening date is August 2022.

For BC and all future residence halls that undergo renewal, all students must move out during construction, and the halls will reopen under Tier 1 pricing, according to an FAQ document linked in the email. (BC is currently Tier 2, which is \$335 cheaper per semester for a double.)

The renewal will primarily involve an "extensive infrastructure and building systems update," including "modest updates to finishes and spaces," the FAQ said. Building codes may dictate that some spaces need to be reconfigured for accessibility, which may in turn necessitate "some space redesign," but it is too early to know.

There is currently a plan to allow BC residents to move out in groups of up to eight, so that they can stay in the same residence hall, but not necessarily the same floor, the FAO continued. BC residents will also

Burton Conner, Page 2

# EECS releases new, more flexible comp. sci. minor requirements

While old requirements would still fulfill the CS minor, new requirements include more options for courses and electives

By Whitney Zhang

NEWS EDITOR

The MIT Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science released its new CS minor requirements Jan. 31 on the CS Minor Piazza page. The requirements will be in effect starting from fall 2019.

The new requirements increase the flexibility of the major with more class choices in broader areas. The new requirements are a superset of the old requirements; completion of the old requirements would also fulfill the new requirements.

The new minor requires a total of 72 units, with up to 12 units of introductory level subjects, up to 63 units of basic level subjects, and at least 12 units of advanced level subjects.

Additionally, students must take at least one software-intensive subject and one algorithms-intensive

There are five options for introductory level subjects, 11 options for basic level subjects, and 28 options for advanced level subjects, with multiple counting as software and algorithms-intensives. In contrast, the old minor required a strict four class core and two additional courses in the basic and advanced electives list, which had three and eight class options, respectively.

Additionally, the new requireinclude interdisciplinary course options, such as 6.809[J] (Interactive Music Systems) and 6.047 (Computational Biology: Genomes, Networks, Evolution).

Substitutions are not planned to be allowed, but student feedback is welcomed, according to EECS Undergraduate Officer Katrina LaCurts PhD '14 in an email to The

LaCurts said that the changes resulted from student and faculty feedback on the original minor suggesting that it was "more restrictive than it needed to be to provide a substantial credential." The changes were developed in the past year with contributions from "a variety of faculty in leadership roles in EECS ... with substantial input from students."

"Feedback has been largely positive so far, with more students interested in pursuing the minor," according to La Curts.

### Faculty panel discusses dorm move-in, room assignment processes

Panel members agree squatting can work, express mixed views on mutual selection

By Rujul Gandhi

A faculty panel convened Feb. 7 to discuss the room assignment and move-in process design exercise that residence halls have been asked to participate in.

The exercise involves suggesting a process that removes upperlevel students' say in first-year room assignment ("mutual selection") and allows first years to retain their initially assigned rooms ("squatting").

The panel consisted of Professors Ray Reagans, Parag Pathak, John Essigmann PhD '76, and John Fernandez '85. It was moderated by Susan Silbey, chair of the faculty. Panelists answered student questions based on their experiences with residence halls and interaction with undergraduates within their dorms as well as their areas of expertise, such as economics and sociology

Students from multiple residence halls asked questions about topics such as community, fairness in the rooming process, and the relationship between mutual selection and homogeneity. Some students spoke to the panel about the rooming processes in their dorms.

The panel seemed to be at a consensus that squatting could be incorporated into the room assignment system. Fernandez, who is part of the Department of Architecture and head of Baker House, defined squatting as "the ability to stay in your room with your roommates," clarifying that this did not apply to a subset of roommates.

In the context of Baker House, which allows squatting, Fernandez said, "We feel, entirely on principle, that if you have a group of residents who want to stay together in a room, that should be allowed."

Fernandez also acknowledged that Baker is "on one end of the spectrum" when it comes to hall culture. Baker doesn't have "very strong and long-standing cultures," he said. Although there is interest in forming "sub-groups" on floors, Fernandez thinks that this will not be "fundamentally compromised by allowing squatting."

In response to student questions about how squatting could be implemented, an algorithm was proposed by Pathak, a professor of microeconomics. First, people are put in a priority order. If Person A wants the room belonging to Person B, B is put higher in the order. B then has the option to look for a room they would like better than their current room. If A and B's preferred rooms are being squatted by their respective occupants, B can also squat their room and A will look for a different room. According to Pathak, this algorithm addresses the problem of people not participating in the rooming process because they are afraid of losing their squatting rights.

"We know there are some students who stay put because it's the asy thing to do said Essigmann head of Simmons Hall and former head of New House. "What we need to do as a community is to find ways to get people to want to get out and explore." He also brought up difficulties in moving from one dorm to another and said that these barriers should be lowered.

"I think there is very little that I see that the motivation for squatting is inconvenience," added Fernandez. He said that it was more common, in his experience at Baker, for people to feel a sense of home with their assigned rooms and roommates.

Panel, Page 2

#### **IN SHORT**

2021 Ring Premiere is 7 p.m. Friday in Kresge Auditorium.

UROP Direct Funding applications are due today.

No class on Monday due to President's Day, an Institute holiday.

Classes next Tuesday will follow a Monday schedule.

Apply to be an **associate advisor** by March 1.

The last day to add half-term subjects for the first half of the semester is this Friday.

Interested in **joining** *The Tech*? Stop by for dinner Sunday at 6 p.m. or email join@tech.mit.edu.

Send news and tips to news@ tech.mit.edu.

### MIT COOP to relocate to a smaller location

COOP building set to be demolished and replaced with commercial building

ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

The MIT COOP will close its Kendall Square location Feb. 25 and relocate to a temporary location at 80 Broadway. The building it currently occupies at 325 Main Street will be demolished and replaced with a new commercial

The COOP will have to occupy a smaller space at its new location, but will offer the same textbooks, supplies, and insignia, Jeremiah P. Murphy, Jr., president of the Harvard Cooperative Society, wrote in an email to The Tech. There will be a reduction in non-academic

**By Kaitlyn Hennacy** goods: the COOP is also considering shifting course textbook purchases to an online platform.

A plan approved in December 2018 provides the framework of the development scope for the new building, Tom Evans, executive director of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, wrote in an email to The Tech. However, the specific building design is pending approval, with its design review scheduled for this month.

The cover sheet of the proposed design, found on the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority website, targets demolition to be-

COOP, Page 2

#### **COMPUTERIZED COMPLIMENTS?**

Auntie Matter is back just in time for Valentine's Day.

CAMPUS LIFE, p. 9

#### **AGAINST THE COLLEGE**

MIT's actions show that ethics won't be central to the new college. OPN, p. 5

#### **DEATH OF MUTUAL SELECTION**

The repercussions of changing room assignment. OPN, p. 6



#### **FROM NYC TO CAMBRIDGE**

We tried the Milk Bar's greatest hits. ARTS, p. 8

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Creating art with bacteria. ARTS, p. 7

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**WEATHER** 

# This Valentine's Day, fall in love with the weather

By Jordan Benjamin
STAFF METEOROLOGIST

Boston doubled its snowfall total for the season this past Tuesday, as a brief snowstorm brought the city's snowfall total to 4.7 in (12 cm), the third lowest seasonal total to date on record. Today, however, we can fall in love with fantastic Valentine's Day weather featuring cool temperatures and sunny skies, perfect for date plans or other activities! For Friday, the region faces another brush with some light precipitation, and

through the weekend we'll enjoy continued seasonable, variable temperatures. Still, nothing major or of the magnitude we saw at the beginning of the week is expected soon. Further abroad, the west coast continues to wade through a barrage of precipitation as deep moisture streams inland from the Pacific. This round of heavy rain and high elevation snow is on top of extended heavy precipitation which has brought crippling snowfall to places like Seattle and raised California reservoirs to near or above full pool.

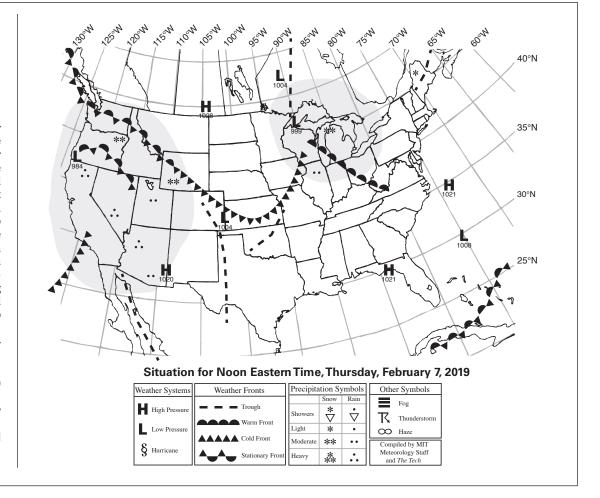
#### **Extended Forecast**

Today: Sunny. High around 38 °F (3 °C). Winds west at 10-20 mph. Tonight: Partly cloudy. Low 31 °F (-1 °C). Winds southwest at 5–10 mph.

**Tomorrow**: Chance showers. High around 52 °F (11 °C). Low around 32 °F (0 °C). Winds southeast at 5–10 mph.

**Saturday**: Mostly sunny. High around 40 °F (4 °C). Low around 22° F (-6 °C).

Sunday: Mostly sunny. High around 36 °F (2 °C).



## IAP course Designing the First Year generates new ideas

Vice Chancellor Waitz: a theme for the class was to think 'blue-sky'

By Soomin Chun

NEWS EDITOR

Nine students participated in the two week 2019 IAP course "Designing the First Year Experience: Fun-Sized" sponsored by the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC). The course was a continuation of the spring 2018 course "Designing the First Year at MIT," with the same underlying concept of using design principles to create ideas for improving the first year.

The course resulted in around 40 ideas that the OVC will now be sifting through.

The students in the class, who ranged from first years to graduate students, split into four teams and met every day for three to five hours to develop action plans that they showcased in a final presentation,

according to Vice Chancellor Ian Waitz in an interview with *The Tech*. All groups supported their action plans by drawing on what literature shows are "high impact practices in education," which lead to more engaged and successful students.

One team created a Garden of Ideas exploratorium in combination with an "MIT4U" application to facilitate awareness and exploration of majors earlier on. At the exploratorium, students would be exposed to a large breadth of projects and demonstrations, be able to look them up in the MIT4U App, and be shown relevant courses and majors to help them reach a finished product.

Dipo Doherty G explained the basis of the exploratorium, saying in a video-recorded presentation forwarded to *The Tech*, "This is tak-

ing a very granular approach. We're going to work from the end product and get the students to understand what concepts that actually go into this product. And last but not least, curiosity, because that's what drives passion, and passion drives innovation in our students."

Another team's project, GIR Up, would "redefine and restructure the first-year GIR experience" by replacing final exams with a "culminating and interdisciplinary project." One example of an interdisciplinary project Janice Tjan '22 gave during her team's presentation was combining the concepts of analyzing shapes in vector spaces from 18.02 and Newton's second law from 8.01 to "create virtual roller coasters" using MATLAB.

Other ideas included REFLEX, which would introduce 3-unit quar-

ter-long major exploration classes and a new first-year learning community that would be an incubator for educational excellence.

The original spring course was a 12-unit HASS-E and design minor credit class that focused on exploring changes that could improve the first-year experience. It culminated in small policy adjustments for a large number of students, such as the new first year experimental grading policy that allows the Class of 2022 to designate up to three General Institute Requirements as Pass/No Record after their first term.

The students taking the IAP course benefited from being able to access six months worth of data collection and stakeholder interviews from the spring, Waitz said. In contrast to the spring course, the

IAP course focus shifted to more radical changes for a smaller group of students, honing in on implementing changes within learning communities.

"We felt that a good theme for this class was to think 'blue-sky' and about inspiring a love of learning, so we sort of gave them encouragement in that direction. We also told them — not in a restrictive way — to think about ideas you could test with a small group of students, and we think that will be important in moving ahead with anything that's a more significant departure from the current system," Waitz said.

According to Waitz, some ideas could be tested in existing learning communities as early as next fall, whereas introducing a novel learning community entirely would take at least another year.

# BC residents may be able to move in groups

Burton Conner, from Page 1

have priority in the housing lottery, and "eligible students" living in BC in spring 2020 who move off campus are guaranteed housing in BC when it reopens.

New House was fully reopened last fall after undergoing a staggered schedule of renovations. It is the first non-dining dorm to be part of the Tier 1 category. Before renovation, the dorm had suffered several pipe bursts, which caused flooding and resulted in some residents staying in the Hyatt Regency hotel for a semester, costing the Institute \$6 million for repairs and living expenses.

"MIT has developed a capital planning framework 'MIT 2030' to guide the renovation and renewal of academic, residential, and student life spaces across the campus," the email to BC residents said.

Campus planners have been reviewing "how best to sequence the renewal of Burton Conner and East Campus," the email continued, although the FAQ noted that decisions about which dorm to renew next have not been made yet.

The email was sent by Vice President and Dean for Student Life Suzy Nelson, Senior Associate Dean of Housing and Residential Services David Friedrich, and BC Heads of House Janelle Knox-Hayes and Jarrod Hayes.

A new dorm is set to open on Vassar Street in fall 2020, but it is not intended to serve as a "swing dorm" for displaced students in dorms undergoing renewal, the FAQ emphasized, as that would interfere with the development of the new dorm's identity and culture.

# Silbey: 'we don't mutually select each other all the time'

Panel, from Page 1

The panel seemed to be more divided on the topic of mutual selection. Essigmann, speaking about his experience in New House, acknowledged both the benefit of mutual selection and that about three to four students each year would be unhappy due to their rooming assignment.

New House has nine houses that mutually select their residents. "Most students felt embraced by a wonderful loving family of people who were like them. So it was good for almost everybody, but some peo-

ple were intensely distressed," Essigmann said.

One student from Burton Conner was concerned that squatting first years might not necessarily be interested in participating in floor culture. Silbey responded that people work at what they have to do together, regardless of who they are working with. She remarked, "For most of human history and even in the contemporary world," people did not participate simply because they've chosen their fellow participants.

"We don't mutually select each other all the time," Silbey said. She gave the example of arranged marriages working out, to the confusion of the audience.

Reagans, a Sloan professor of organization studies, said that while he "couldn't imagine what it would feel like" to be turned down by a community, mutual selection is working for some residence halls. "The objective was to find alternative ways to realize the benefits that mutual selection is creating," he said. "So it wasn't necessarily removing something, but trying to figure out ... what exactly are the benefits that it's creating, and if we know what they are, are there other ways?"

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2019 THE TECH 3

### COOP to reopen Mar. 4

COOP, from Page 1

gin this May and completion of the new building for early 2022. Boston Properties is the developer in charge of this site.

The bottom two floors of the proposed building design have been designated for retail stores, restaurants, and a public lobby that connects Kendall Plaza to the Kendall Rooftop Garden. The other 14 floors of the over-244-foot building are planned to be used as office space. As part of the project, a new head house for the Kendall Square outbound T station has been proposed and is pending MBTA approval.

According to a government affairs update sent by the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce in December 2018, Google is likely to be the anchor tenant of the new building. The building will connect to Google's current office at 355 Main St.

The preliminary building design received scrutiny for blocking view of other buildings and light. Revised plans published to the CRA website in January removed bulk from the building, expanding the gap separating it from other build-

ings. Furthermore, floor-to-ceiling height was reduced, allowing for an additional floor, increasing floor

However, according to a study included in the design document, the shadow of the proposed building would still cover up to 90 percent of the rooftop garden behind it, depending on the season and time of day.

Discussion regarding plans for a new building began 2011 during the City of Cambridge's K2 Planning process, Evans wrote. According to Evans, motivations for the new building include "allowing space for the innovation economy to grow in Kendall, building a more mixed use neighborhood, expanding public amenities, and pursuing sustainable development."

Murphy wrote that the COOP has the option of returning to the newly built commercial building at 325 Main St. when it is complete. The COOP had worked with the site developer, Boston Properties, for several months to agree on the relocation.

In the meantime, the COOP is expected to reopen at its temporary 80 Broadway location on March 4.

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The MIT COOP is relocating to a temporary, smaller location at 80 Broadway, set to open March 4.

Want to draw graphics that engage, provoke, and speak to the MIT community?

The Tech is looking for editorial cartoonists.

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#### Solution to Wedding

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**GUEST COLUMN** 

## Celebrating war criminals at MIT's 'ethical' College of Computing

MIT claims that ethical considerations will be central to College of Computing's work, but its actions have suggested otherwise

On Feb. 26-28, MIT will celebrate the opening of the Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing, named after the CEO of the Blackstone Group (the largest private equity firm in the U.S.). Schwarzman, who has a net personal worth of over \$12 billion, invested \$350 million in the initiative.

MIT claims "ethics" are integral to the college's mission. MIT President Rafael Reif declared that, "As computing reshapes our world, MIT intends to help make sure it does so for the good of all." Schwarzman said that "attention to ethics matters enormously" to him and that "we will never realize the full potential of these advancements unless they are guided by a shared understanding of their moral implications

#### Schwarzman's alliance with the Saudi Crown Prince represents an agenda of profit at any cost.

However, the MIT administration's conduct has been anything but "ethical." First, there is MIT's willingness to accept Schwarzman's money, for which it has already been criticized. Concerns about Schwarzman are far ranging, from being an advisor to Donald Trump to heading the Blackstone Group that spent millions opposing an affordable housing ballot measure in California. Last spring, Schwarzman hosted the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) a war criminal in charge of a repressive monarchy - after Blackstone received a \$20 billion investment from his government. All the while, millions of Yemenis are suffering from starvation and disease as a consequence of the U.S.-backed, Saudi-led coalition's assaults. MBS also has an extensive record of human rights violations at home, jailing and silencing activists (including women fighting for the right to drive). His government also persecuted Saudis across the globe who speak out against his policies (or who simply attempt to seek asylum elsewhere).

Schwarzman's alliance with the Saudi crown prince represents an agenda of profit at any cost, a far cry from the pious statements about "ethics" pronounced in public. Schwarzman's vision is perhaps better captured by his 2011 remarks equating the Obama administration's plan for a minor increase in corporate taxes (raising the "carried-interest tax") to Hitler's invasion of Poland.

We should note that it is not just Schwarzman who has ties to MBS. Last spring, MIT officials also received MBS as an honored guest and extended numerous partnerships with his government. The upcoming celebrations only add insult to

One of the slated featured speakers for eb. 28 is Henry Kissinger, whom MIT ir

role model for U.S. foreign policy — despite his role in multiple atrocities worldwide. During his long career, Kissinger backed Indonesian dictator Suharto who, aided by U.S. intelligence, murdered up to a million of his own people. With Kissinger's backing as U.S. Secretary of State, Suharto also invaded East Timor in 1975, which led to the deaths of over one hundred thousand East Timorese. In Chile, Kissinger spearheaded the Nixon administration's successful efforts to topple the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende and install Augusto Pinochet's brutal military dictatorship.

In addition to his well-known role in prolonging the Vietnam War, Kissinger also orchestrated secret bombing campaigns in Cambodia and Laos. More bombs were dropped on Cambodia and Laos in those years than the Allies dropped on their enemies during all of World War II. To this day, unexploded bombs threaten the lives and livelihood of people in these regions. However, Kissinger remains unrepentant for his role in bloody invasions, bombings,

For the MIT administration, as for Schwarzman, money trumps concerns for human rights and economic justice. It is only fitting, then, that political commentator Thomas Friedman was also invited to speak at the upcoming event as Friedman's writing was pivotal in creating MBS's image as a "reformer" in the media. This narrative distracted from MBS's responsibility for atrocities in Yemen, which mainstream U.S. media only started seriously covering after columnist Jamal Khashoggi's murder by a Saudi hit squad. In spite of criticism from students, faculty, and the local community, the MIT administration has refused to cut ties with the Saudi government or acknowledge the depth of the harm in its continued relationship. Similarly, regarding the Schwarzman College, the administration has also failed to address numerous questions from students and faculty about the college's direction and focus. Rather than engaging with the community, the administration adopted an uncritically "celebratory" tone towards the college's opening that caters to donors.

#### For the MIT administration, as for Schwarzman, money trumps concerns for human rights and economic justice.

But how can we celebrate a college claiming to lead ethical, thoughtful research when war criminals such as Kissinger are invited to speak? When the college is funded by the CEO of a company that accepts billions of dollars made by waging devastating wars on civilians? When MIT vited — and whom Schwarzman sees as a invites former Google CEO Eric Schmidt,

who famously dismissed the very idea of privacy and the abusive powers of surveillance, to help guide "ethical" computing research? Or when MIT, in the height of cynicism, picks Thomas Friedman to moderate a panel on "Computing for the People?" How can we believe that this new college will take justice, ethics, or morals seriously, given the figures MIT has chosen to represent the endeavor?

#### For all these reasons, we are calling on MIT's administration to cancel the February celebrations for the new College.

Underlying the whole of this is MIT's growing quest for private sponsorship, military contracts, and the wrong kind of prestige. Rather than promoting thoughtful discussion about the direction of the university, the administration stages Davos-like spectacles, of which the Schwarzman College celebrations are a prime

For all these reasons, we are calling on MIT's administration to cancel the February celebrations for the new college and issue an apology for inviting Henry Kissinger. If they are not canceled, we urge the MIT community to boycott these

Since this won't be sufficient to address the deep structural flaws of our Institute and especially the Schwarzman College, we invite everyone to an alternate event at 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 26, organized by students and other members of the community, to discuss these systemic issues and the direction of the university. Finally, we ask faculty to support and enable participation in the alternate event Feb. 26 and in the urgent discussion it seeks to foster.

Email MIT.CoC.protest@gmail.com to receive updates about the alternative event.

#### **Signatories:** Alonso Espinosa Domínguez, Class of 2020

Remy Bassett-Audain, Class of 2020 Husayn Karimi, Class of 2019 Berenice Estrada, Class of 2019 Claire Isabel Webb, PhD Candidate Ruth Perry, Professor Sally Haslanger, Professor Jonathan King, Professor Kevin Leonardo, SB 2018 Sarah Aladetan, SB 2018 Agnes Fury Cameron, MAS 2019 Yarden Katz, PhD 2014 Andrew Bolton, PhD 2014 Lauren Surface, PhD 2014 Kade Crockford,

MIT Media Lab Director's Fellow Katherine McConachie, Manager,

MIT Media Lab Learning Initiative Subrata Ghoshroy, Research Affiliate, STS Alice Pote, Software Engineer

MIT Open Learning

#### OPINION POLICY

Editorials are the official opinion of The Tech. They are written by the Editorial Board, which consists of Editor in Chief Jessica Shi and Opinion Editor Fiona Chen.

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### From mutual selection to mutual exclusion

The redesign of living community room assignment procedures will isolate incoming classes from older students and diminish floor culture

By Hairuo Guo

Each August, a buzzing on campus betrays the presence of two optimization problems. One is the emergence of cicada nymphs, some species of which mature in cycles of coprime years to avoid a dearth of resources. The other also involves a progression to a new stage in life — the arrival and subsequent housing assignment of first years. Shortly after stepping foot on campus, new students must move into temporary rooms, determine the residential communities of which they'd like to be a part, and move yet again once final assignments are made. This sequence is accomplished with the assistance of an older population: upper-level students do their part to represent their living groups and, eventually, assign

#### Chancellor Barnhart and Dean Nelson of the DSL have charged student leaders of campus dorms to redesign the room assignment procedures.

Cicadas might have arrived at a solution to their problem through natural selection, but the problem of placing the incoming class is often solved using mutual selection: a collection of dorm-distinct processes that are used to match new residents with intradorm communities using the preferences of both. However, this long-standing practice is in peril. Seeking to prevent forced moves and minimize feelings of rejection among first years, Chancellor Barnhart and Dean Nelson of the DSL have charged student leaders of campus dorms to redesign the room assignment procedures for their respective communities. New designs must conform to two criteria: upper-level students must not preference or select new members of their living groups (therefore precluding mutual selection), and first years must have the option to remain in, or "squat," their initial rooming assignments.

# They threaten to diminish community cohesion in dorms with floor cultures and convolute an already complicated housing process.

Although both requirements seem reasonable prima facie, they threaten to diminish community cohesion in dorms with floor cultures and convolute an already complicated housing process. Indeed, first years that "squat" will have avoided the hassle of moving twice — but it will likely come at the cost of long-term wellbeing. Since the majority of first years arrive on campus before the official move-in date (and before most upper-level students are back for the fall), the only information that is immediately present is that of situational convenience. What is not present is information about the essence of a community: the personalities of its individuals. New residents that decide to "squat" based on first impressions of proximity and cosmetics — who attempt to play it safe in the face of uncertainty about the second, final assignment — will have done so without the benefit of knowing who they would like to live with. Complacent with their initial assignment, they will also have no further incentive to take part in exploratory events that showcase cultures and foster friendships across a dorm as a whole.

Furthermore, it is naive to expect that unobvious but nonetheless vital insights could be effectively communicated to new residents through summer materials. Some insights concern details of a granularity that

translates poorly to summaries (e.g., which rooms are close to noise or have neighbors who enjoy burning pungent incense); others, if broadly advertised, could jeopardize the safety of current and prospective residents (e.g., which living groups have a large LGBTQ+ representation). Thus, "squatting" leads to situations that are ripe for regret and later complicates logistics regarding requests for housing transfers. In dorms where the majority of rooms house multiple residents, it instantly amounts to additional restrictions that over-burdened assignment committees must then scramble to satisfy.

Disallowing mutual selection will result in short and long-term repercussions, too. Beyond the questionable efficacy of a policy meant to eliminate feelings of rejection among first years, (which rests on a double standard, since FSILGs will continue to offer bids), this new policy is questionably effective in other regards. Solely taking into account the preferences of new residents during housing assignments will serve to change only the nature, not number, of anecdotal complaints and to diminish upper-level student engagement. With mutual selection, upper-level students in living groups are able to determine and indicate desired outcomes for their communities, using honest interactions with prospective members as bases. Ignore what those desires are, however, and upper-level students will be forced to try to realize them through other means. Prominent living groups - often those with distinctive cultures that pique the interests of many new residents - will likely resort to actively dissuading many first years from ranking them highly. The type of candid, positive interactions that currently abound in intra-dorm exploratory events will then be supplanted by the direct confrontations that define an "anti-rush," where current residents may be deliberately abrasive or hurtful to those that might not thrive on their floors. Other communities can expect reduced buy-in from upper-level students, who will be pushed towards apathy by the erasure of their agency. The results of the 2017 Dorm Life Survey indicate that for undergraduates, their peers are often the go-tos for advice on a wide range of topics; given that upperlevel students often perform the function of experienced, informal mentors, weakened ties between them and first years will have grave consequences.

#### Weakened ties between upper-level students and first years will have grave consequences.

Blindly applying the criteria that Chancellor Barnhart and Dean Nelson have provided can only isolate incoming classes from the earned wisdom of older students when it is much needed — both during the first weeks of each fall and in the many that follow. Luckily, the motivations behind the re-evaluation of how first years move-in and are assigned can be met without such heavy-handed mandates. For instance, randomness can be introduced into algorithms used for mutual selection to reduce feelings of rejection, and the details of the move-in and room assignment process can be better advertised so that new residents do not unpack unnecessarily before their second move. Regardless of what changes dorms make to their policies, they must be accompanied by strong assurances that administrators will do their part by guaranteeing that the materials and knowledge for a less frustrating move-in will be properly disseminated. To expect otherwise — that these two requirements would generalize well across a campus as diverse as ours — is to hope that they won't lead to a system where students, like cicadas, self-segregate in years: where, in the place of mutual selection, we are left with mutual exclusion.

Hairuo Guo is a master's degree candidate at MIT and a former resident of East Campus.

# **LETTER TO THE EDITOR**Financial support of MIT is unethical

President Reif and Provost Lester have thrown their lots — and MIT's — in with those who allow business to trump morality. This is inexcusable at any institution of higher learning, and I am upset to see it happening at my alma mater. The argument that MIT cannot cease working

with the nation of Saudi Arabia without punishing its worthy scholars is a cynical (and unproven) smokescreen that serves to obscure a much less palatable idea — that state-sanctioned murder to silence a journalist can be rationalized as a minor transgression, so as not to damage a lucrative relationship.

In view of MIT's ethical failure, I have concluded that financial support of MIT is in turn unethical. I will instead be supporting Reporters Without Borders.

— Jim Newman SB '79, SM '84

#### CORRECTIONS

A news article in last week's issue about President Reif's decision on Saudi Arabia misstated that the costs associated with termination rights were considered in the evaluation process. In fact, the costs were not considered.

A news article in last week's issue about the swastika found in Lobby 7 stated that Dean Suzy Nelson emailed the MIT community about the incident. In fact, the letter was written by both Nelson and Interim ICEO Alyce Johnson.

The solutions to last week's crossword puzzle "Stake a Claim" were for the wrong puzzle. The correct solutions are included below.

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# Got a lot on your mind?

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## Shunned by Harvard, feted by MIT

Subramanian Swamy, a member of India's ruling party, is set to speak at the MIT India Conference despite his homophobic and Islamophobic past

By Husayn Karimi and Arif Hussain

This year's annual MIT India Conference is slated for Feb. 16, 2019. Similar to earlier years, the conference has listed a phalanx of Indian speakers drawn from tech, business, politics, and entertainment. It is organized by students, staff, and faculty across different departments at MIT, and speakers are primarily sourced from the networks of faculty advisors and students. Add to that the MIT brand name, and it's not very difficult to attract prominent figures from India.

In his almost fivedecade-long political career, Swamy has mostly associated with center-right to far-right political parties.

One speaker that stands out this year is Subramanian Swamy. Swamy is a member of India's current ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and is a nominated member of the Indian Parliament's upper house. A Harvard-trained economist, Swamy has had a controversial academic and political past. After briefly teaching economics at Harvard, he went back to India and for a short while taught at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, got fired and joined politics in the early 1970s.

In his almost five-decade-long political career, Swamy has mostly associated with center-right to far-right political parties. He started out with the Brahmin nationalist party

Jan Sangh — the predecessor of BJP — in the 70s and after many flings with multiple political formations, including the Indian National Congress, officially joined the BJP in 2013.

In an interview, Swamy said that "being homosexual" is "not normal," is "against Hindutva," and needs "medical research to see if it can be cured."

On July 16, 2011, in an op-ed in Indian newspaper Daily News and Analysis titled "How to wipe out Islamic terror," Swamy proposed, among other things, to "[r]emove the masjid [mosque] in Kashi Vishwanath temple complex, and 300 others in other sites as a tit-for-tat," and to "declare India as Hindu Rashtra in which only those non-Hindus can vote if they proudly acknowledge that their ancestors are Hindus." The op-ed was criticized by readers but was also praised within the Brahmin Supremacist ecosystem of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent organization of BJP. The Harvard Division of Continuing Education, which runs the Harvard Summer School program at which Swamy taught, initially supported Swamy in the name of free speech and resisted the calls to censure him. Neoconservatives in the U.S. were delighted and Fox News did an interview with Swamy, in which the interviewer Steve Doocy said, "Your oped was absolutely right. People have got to stand-up to Islamic terror." Swamy also commended Harvard for being a "beacon light" for free speech by allowing him to continue as a summer school instructor.

The episode made Swamy famous in the U.S., but it came at a cost. Later in December, Harvard faculty voted to discontinue Swamy's summer school courses, effectively shutting him out of Harvard. The decision was largely supported by students.

Swamy's outbursts against social and religious minorities of India didn't stop with the inflammatory and Islamophobic op-ed he penned in 2011.

In 2016, following the suicide of Rohith Vemula, a bright Dalit — a social group kept outside the Brahminical social caste system's hierarchy and thus historically suppressed PhD candidate, large scale protests by members of oppressed castes broke out all over India and abroad. Swamy called these protesters "dogs" in a tweet from his official

#### Later in December, Harvard faculty voted to discontinue Swamy's summer school courses, effectively shutting him out of Harvard.

In recent times, Swamy has been in the news for speaking out against the decriminalization of sex between consenting adults of the same gender, insisting that homosexuality is "not a normal thing." Swamy said, "These are all American habits, there's a lot of money behind it. The Americans want to open gay bars, and it'll be a cover for pedophiles and a huge rise in HIV cases. It is a danger to our national security." In another interview, Swamy said that "being homosexual" is "not normal," is "against Hindutva," and needs "medical research to see if it can be cured." Hardly kind to people with mental and psychiatric disorders either, Swamy warned against bipolar people joining politics, describing them as violent and unfit to "lead a public life."

It is interesting to see the return of Swamy to the north banks of the Charles River, this time to MIT. There is already a petition on Change.org imploring President Reif to disinvite Swamy from the conference, and earlier this week, a group of MIT faculty members wrote to President Reif and Provost Schmidt expressing their opposition to the India conference's invitation to Swamy. So far the people behind Swamy's invitation, notably Prof. S.P. Kothari — also the Chairman of last year's World Hindu Congress in Chicago, an RSS jamboree — are silent on the ongoing protest. Coming at the heels of MIT's recent refusal to dissociate from Mohammad bin Salman and Saudi investment, whether this invitation signifies the MIT administration's conscious tip towards a more conservative, even reactionary worldview, or is just an attempt by vested interests to establish currency for a particular political viewpoint, will be judged by the final decision on the matter by MIT leadership.

Husayn Karimi is a member of the MIT Class of 2019 studying computer science. Arif Hussain is an activist and political analyst based in the Boston area.

Editor's note: this article was published

#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Chancellor and provost respond to column on MIT India Conference

To the Editors,

Each year, the MIT India Conference is organized and run by MIT graduate students, with the guidance of faculty and staff advisors. When it takes place this year on Feb. 16, Dr. Subramanian Swamy is scheduled to speak by video on the subject of the Indian

Because some of Dr. Swamy's past public statements are sharply out of step with MIT's values of inclusiveness and respect, a number of people inside and outside our community are asking the MIT administration to intercede and rescind his invitation to speak.

This is a moment when two of our most deeply held values - freedom of expression and inclusion — are in conflict. For MIT as a university, guarding freedom of expression  $\,$ is fundamental to our mission of advancing knowledge and educating students. We are and must be committed to ensuring that different points of view - even those we reject — can be heard and debated in a respectful

and safe way. At the same time, however, as a global institution that depends on bringing together talented people from around the world, we are and must be profoundly committed to making sure we create a community where people of every background — in terms of nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation and more - can feel welcome and supported.

In this instance, our students have chosen to allow Dr. Swamy to speak. We support their right to do so, and we expect to maintain our community's standards of open, respectful dialogue.

Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart Provost Martin Schmidt

with whom we disagree. As moderator of Dr. Swamy's session, I will work to maintain a dialogue that is open but respectful.

Second, the event is student run, with the guidance of faculty and staff advisors. Over the last few days, as the student organizers faced pressure to disinvite Dr. Swamy, they came together to consider how best to proceed. Some feel that Dr. Swamy's statements are so egregious as to make him unfit to participate. Others believe he has something important to say about India's future Lunderstand and respect both nos tions. Ultimately, the students took a vote, with the majority opposed to rescinding the

While the student organizers are divided on this particular issue, I am grateful for their dedication to this important conference. And I am grateful for their willingness to work together despite their differences of opinion.

Sincerely. S.P. Kothari

# Wanna make columns? Not an architect? Join Campus Life at *The Tech*! join@tech.mit.edu

#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### **Faculty advisor** responds to column on MIT India Conference

**NOINION OPINION** 

I am writing in my capacity as an advito the student organizers of the MIT India Conference, scheduled for this Saturday, and as faculty director of the MIT-India

The opinion column published in The Tech, "Shunned by Harvard, feted by MIT," describes the controversy surrounding Dr. Subramanian Swamy, a member of India's ruling party who will join the conference by video. The writers detail a number of statements Dr. Swamy has made and suggest that his participation is out of sync with MIT's values. I would like to offer some

First, the conference organizers and faculty advisors have an unequivocal and unwavering commitment to MIT's values. Among those values is inclusion, of course, but also freedom of expression and a willingness to listen to those whose views may differ from our own. Dr. Swamy will speak about India's economic future, a topic I believe is appropriate for the MIT India Conference The student organizers programmed the event to include a diversity of opinions. It's important to note that inclusion does not equate to endorsement by the organizers, the advisors, or the Institute. My role as an advisor and educator is to position our students to engage with, not isolate themselves from, those with different - sometimes even abhorrent views. Therefore, I think it is important that we find opportunities to hear from those

# Have something to say? Write opinion for The Tech!

opinion@tech.mit.edu



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2019 THE TECH 7

#### **ARTIST FEATURE**

# Human-scented perfume, bacteria-painted sculptures, mind-controlled sperm

Research-based artist and MIT graduate Ani Liu redefines contemporary art

**By Alana Chandler** STAFF WRITER

Art is a visceral form of storytelling that has existed throughout human history. It captures the human experience across generations, cultures, and places. Time melts the raw, rock-etched pictographs and fruitdyed pigments stroked on cave walls into the sinewy marble sculptures of the Romans and natural landscapes of Asian woodblock prints. Time flows, transforming art along with it, swirling in a current of emerging technologies of each age: from the simple wheel enabling the sculptor to move large stones to chemical processes blooming vibrant dyes to digital photography capturing scenes with pixel instead of paint. The powerful influence that evolving technologies have on artistic expression, or perhaps art itself — the innate messages and techniques - propels the growth of human civilization. Technology shapes our thinking and self-expression. As the 21st century rapidly brings us closer to a world woven with the synthetic threads of artificial intelligence and automation, how will art react?

#### As the 21st century rapidly brings us closer to a world woven with the synthetic threads of artificial intelligence and automation, how will art react?

This is one of many questions that fuel research-based artist Ani Liu SM '17 in her transdisciplinary work. Her pieces encompass the intersection of aesthetics, science, design, and technology. In one project, Liu took an alternative perspective on the traditional artistic motif of the human portrait. Instead of painting a figure on a canvas, Liu used silicon, oil, wax, minerals and hair to symbolically dissociate the body into its constituent components as a deconstructed machine: water, fat, protein, and minerals. She also added non-organic elements, such as microcontrollers and diodes, to represent a future where technology is integrated in our bodies. Confronting the viewer with the materiality of life, the piece begs the questions, What does it mean to be human and alive? How did such rudimentary building blocks create the phenomena of qualia, subjectivity, and sentience? In another project, Liu created performance art in which female participants could control a magnified plate of sperm with their mind using a headpiece that measured the electrical activity on one's scalp — a compelling feat, both technically and politically. Contextualized in an era of "locker room talk," contraceptive regulation, and age-old sexual abuse, this subversive counternarrative pushes viewers to reflect on what agency, or the lack thereof, a woman has in controlling her body. From virtual reality to MRIs to microbiomes, Liu leverages the technologies around us as media to redefine this era's version of contemporary art.

Growing up in Chinatown as the child of immigrants, she was pushed towards science and math in what she describes as "a very typical Asian American fashion." However, she always dreamed of becoming an artist. "Finding a way to make art with the tools of science and technology was my way of integrating both the pressure I felt from my culture and my family, and then also pursuing my passion," Liu said. In integrating technology with art, Liu felt that she "finally found a way to voice the questions [she] wanted to ask."

Despite this intense passion, Liu had reservations about becoming an artist in a society that most values commercial products, materiality, and corporations. When discussing this doubt with her mentor at university, he suggested Liu think about political revolutions: "You know what the regimes always stifle first? They kill the artists first."

Liu can pinpoint the project that launched her journey into the amalgam

of art, philosophy, and science. While she was an architecture master's student at Harvard, one of her design professors, Dr. Krzvsztof Wodiczko, mentioned in class the idea of "cultural prosthetics" - wearable technologies, like Google Glass and bodily implants, that reflect the ideas, customs, and social behaviors of society. These technologies are designed to be additions or interventions that eventually "become" part of you and your identity, blurring the boundary between human and machine. Outside of class, Liu read Sherry Trickle's Alone Together, which discusses the idea that, even though technologies connect society more than ever with global networks that run 24/7, many people actually feel more isolated. That concept resonated with Liu, recalling times at parties when, instead of talking with those around her, she would ease her social anxiety by looking at her phone. Liu began to wonder, "Can I build something that would force me to interact with people?"

Her first piece was inspired by these questions. It was a helmet that prevented her from seeing anyone unless they stepped up and held her hand. On her hand was a capacitive touch sensor that was connected to the helmet by a wire running up her arm. That sensor, in turn, triggered a gear that caused an iris in the helmet to open and close like the aperture to a camera. During this project, she also learned how to use an arduino and 3D printer; Liu said, "I spent my life learning how to draw and sculpt, and with these tools, I could give [my art] a brain."

In addition to a mind, Liu gives her art smells. She created a string of scent-based works after reading a quote by Caroline Jones, an MIT professor in the architecture department: "Smell is preverbal and has no capacity to pretend." When looking at something, one interprets the symbols, piecing them together to form meaning. By contrast, Liu believes that "smell goes straight to the core of emotions, clutching your body."

Her "Smelfie Project" — a title that is a play on the words "smell" and "selfie" is one in which she captures the scent of loved ones to create a "human perfume." As unique as the project is in and of itself, Liu's path to the project is just as intriguing. Learning about biotechnology for the first time, she was looking at what motivated its progress, like genetic engineering in agriculture. She unavoidably arrived at the products of Monsanto, a "Big Agro" company, where she learned that some of the genetic engineering embodied in their seeds has nothing to do with the nutrition or survival of the seeds. Rather, the seeds were designed so that farmers could not plant crops that reproduced themselves, thus forcing farmers to keep buying seeds every season, engineering an organism for the purpose of supreme capitalism. Liu was shaken by such a brazen use of bioengineering, a revolutionary technology, to grow pure profit instead of crops.

#### Liu says, "I spent my life learning how to draw and sculpt, and with these tools, I could give [my art] a brain."

Instead of engineering infertile seeds for patent, Liu wondered how she could harness this technology for artmaking. What type of plant would she create if she could grow anything? Her thoughts meandered over "time capsule plants" which would blossom flowers that smelled like a specific person to preserve their memory. Unfortunately, the barriers of money, time, and scientific manpower prevented her from actually cultivating such an organism. As a byproduct of her research on capturing human scent, she instead developed a method for crafting a perfume that smelled like a particular person — the "Smelfie Project" was born. She put stinky t-shirts from her peers through gas chromatography, measuring molecular weights, to reverse engineer what molecules were in the smells. She also used traditional botanical perfume-making techniques, soaking the smelly garments in solvents to capture the volatile molecules, and then distilled the resulting essence. "This project was very meaningful to me," Liu said, "because in all the ways we as humans try to hold onto ephemeral moments in time, like taking many photographs, this was a different way of recording a moment

#### "You know what the regimes always stifle first? They kill the artists first."

The idea of scent as a time capsule led Liu to consider astronauts — those thrust into an environment of ultimate unfamiliarity. Liu said she feels as though researchers "do so much investigation on jet propulsion, logistics, astrophysics," yet she was "interested in the emotional qualities of the person who was on this journey." What would it be like to be on a one-way trip to space? What would happen if we actually destroyed the environmental resources on Earth and could no longer live here? "I was trying to imagine giving birth in space, like raising children there, maybe that child never having smelled the smell of the ocean. How could I again make this kind of memory time capsule where current or future astronauts could connect to Earth?" She was ultimately successful in capturing smells like dirt and the sea by working with the International Flavors and Fragrance Incorporation. As artistically innovative as her idea was, she had to consider many scientific factors before testing her project out in zero gravity. One consideration was that zero gravity redistributes the blood in one's body, causing more blood to travel to the head, which makes one's nose stuffy. Therefore, Liu had to make notes of certain smells stronger.

Liu's captivation with the human body extends to the bacteria that inhabit us. As an MIT Media Lab graduate student, Lui attended a microbiology lecture about sterile mice born without microbiomes, who

were later exposed to the microbiomes of an aggressive or anxious mouse. Mice given the microbiomes of the aggressive mouse became aggressive themselves, and the same for mice given the microbiomes of the anxious mouse. Liu said, "This was very pivotal for me because up until then I had understood behavior as nature versus nurture, but the idea that my microbiome could influence my moods and behaviors was so weird — another organism shaping who I am!" She found beauty in this realization as well, in that it removes some of one's ego in knowing that "I'm not just me, but I'm me plus a million other organisms culminating me."

#### Liu's captivation with the human body extends to the bacteria that inhabit us.

Liu decided to explore the invisible prevalence of microbiomes through a series of self-portraits. She took a cast of her face and mouth to make a mold and poured in agar and microbial nutrients to make a "petri-dish" sculpture of her face. She then kissed this human-like petri-dish to impart her microbial cultures onto it. After incubating and growing the cultures, she created a visual reflection of her microbiome, ripe with blue fuzz, white puffs, and a plethora of other oddly mesmerizing bacterial patterns.

Through her artistic investigations, Liu has come to the realization that, "at the end of the day, we're just meat machines that deeply, emotionally, feel." As rational, logical, and systematic as we make ourselves to be, Liu says that humans will always be drawn to consuming and making art because it captures some core essence of living in us. Liu's scientific, research-based art is not only entertaining and beautiful, but also educates viewers on how technologies shape what it means to be human, how we interact with each other, and our relationship to ourselves.

Ani Liu's work can be found at the following website: https://ani-liu.com



Ani's first project combining art and science, Eyeris is a 'cultural prosthetic' preventing its wearer from seeing unless someone else holds their hand.

#### **RESTAURANT REVIEW**

# **Cereal milk, transformed**

#### Milk Bar uses common flavors in a way you wouldn't expect

By Kaitlyn Hennacy

Christina Tosi — well known for judging MasterChef and saying, "Life's too short to worry about how many cookies you ate today" in a Chef's Table episode about her — opened a Cambridge location of her bakery Feb. 2.

The original Milk Bar in New York City began Tosi's rise to fame. Now, the bakery has a foothold in Harvard Square near the T station. Excited about the hype around its cereal milk ice cream and crack pie, I headed there with Sharon Chao '21 and Rujul Gandhi '22 to share the sugar rush.

Since I read two of her books and watched her Chef's Table episode three entire times, I had high expectations for the desserts that have gained the attention of 500,000 Instagram followers.

I was not disappointed. The desserts there are different from what you would find at any other bakery. Part of the reason is the dehydrated milk powder that gives many of the treats a subtle flavor that's hard to give a name to. If you have never had dry milk powder, it



Cereal milk soft serve with cornflake crunch is one of Milk Bar's most popular

does not taste like regular milk. I can't describe it easily, but I would say it is a little salty with a very mild milk-candy flavor. It's interesting how this ingredient brings together so many items on the menu.

We ordered a sampler of Milk Bar's "greatest hits." First, I tried the cereal milk ice cream with cornflake crunch, a beautiful cup of softserve with its edges rolled in golden cereal. Upon first taste, the saltiness of the cornflake crunch surprised me. Buttery with the addicting taste of dry milk powder, the cornflakes delivered genuine crunch that was lacking from everything else we tried. The milk powder taste was present in the ice cream. It was hard to see why it was called cereal milk ice cream, since it tasted more like plain milk, but concentrating on it, I could pick up the faint taste of the cornflakes that were steeped in the milk making up the ice cream.

But, when I think of cereal milk, I don't think of this flavor. I would have expected Froot Loops or Cap'n Crunch, but I guess this was inspired by more of an adult cereal. The taste was unexpected, much different from the vanilla ice cream it looks like and a lot less sweet. Overall, it was a bit plain and additional sugariness could have made it more interesting.

Somewhat more familiar to the senses, the "milkquakes" bring the sweetness you would expect from frozen desserts. These are cereal milk ice cream blended with cake or cake truffles. They come in B'day cake flavor or, what we tried since it's unique to this location, Boston cream pie. Aesthetically, it is inspired by the cream-filled butter cake that Boston is famous for. Its components are yellow cake, cereal-milk ice cream, and hot fudge. It had the the taste of a vanilla milkshake with hot fudge, but it did not taste like Boston cream pie. As it melted a bit, the texture of the yellow cake bits stood out more and the flavor of it became more noticeable. The taste of dry milk powder from the cereal milk also came out over time, and overall, it was delicious.

The compost cookie tasted better than I expected it would, given it was named after decaying organic matter. The cookie was speckled with coffee and and butterscotch. There was also a good level of saltiness. However, the texture made the cookie not that enjoyable for me. I noticed the potato chips and pretzels in the cookie for their texture, but instead of adding crunch as I would expect, they added a stick-in-your-teeth kind of feeling that reminded me of stale crackers. This defined the texture of the entire cookie, since the add-ins were not in discrete chunks but were put in a food processor, so tiny bits were dispersed throughout.

B'day cake truffles ended up being my favorite. Cake truffles have the texture of a rich, fudgy chocolate truffle but taste like cake and frosting. They are made by crushing cake and buttercream together and forming them into balls. This truffle surprised me because the cake-to-frosting ratio was perfect. It had the right level of sweetness and a fudgy texture from the frosting, but it still tasted like a slice of cake, unlike many cake truffles I have had. The truffle was encased by a super-thin crunchy layer of milk powder crumble, pairing well with the dense interior. It had a faint taste that reminded me of funnel cake and summer carnivals. Enjoying these B'day cake truffles truly made me feel like I was celebrating something.

Last, I picked up the crack pie. The abundance of eggs in the filling gave it a gooey consistency, like a lemon bar. The eggs were not overpowering, and the taste was

**★★★☆☆** Milk Bar Bakery, \$ 1-3 Brattle Street Cambridge, MA 02138 Sunday-Thursday 7–12 a.m. Friday-Saturday 7-2 a.m.

a concentrated form of the buttery caramel notes that cookies give off when baking in the oven. Though it was served a bit chilled, I suspect a couple of seconds in the microwave would have made the dessert as irresistible as the name implies. The oat cookie crust was the only disappointing part. The crumbly crust was softened by the filling, but it still stuck in your teeth a bit. The texture threw me off, and I would have found the pie better without it.

While some desserts could have been better. Tosi wins points for creativity. Enter her mind when she decided to make ice cream that tastes like cereal or cookies that combine coffee and potato chips. Think about the subtle flavor of dry milk powder, something usually reserved for busy families without the time to go to buy normal milk, that comes up in everything. Tosi brings flavors of her childhood into her desserts. Her identity is woven into the desserts through her choice of ingredients.

#### **INTERVIEW**

# Rona Wang '21 talks identity, art, and writing the heroes of your own story

Publishing the short fiction collection Cranesong

By Ivy Li

Last week, The Tech reviewed Rona Wang

'21's short fiction collection Cranesong. Its short stories explore the Chinese and Chinese American experience. She spoke to  $\mathit{The}$ Tech about her writing process, the road to publication, and the importance of diversity being represented in media.

The Tech: I was wondering where you get your inspiration for your writing style and how your thought process works when you write stories.

Rona Wang '21: It's definitely been a process of many years. When I was in seventh grade, I did the whole thing where I would wake up at 3 a.m. and write anime fanfiction and post it online. I spent many, many years writing before I got to a point where I'm getting this short story collection published. I think a lot of it was reading other people's works and seeing what I liked about them. I realized that I was really drawn to imagery. There were passages that were infused with imagery within even the Percy Jackson books that I would come back to. That [imagery] was definitely something that I wanted to create in my own work as well.

TT: In the collection, the story that stood out to me was "The Art of Acceptance," because I never thought about this time period in the U.S [of anti-Japanese discrimination during WWII]. This is specific to this story since most of the other stories are set in modern times but I was wondering if you did research?

Wang: The story was written after I read a book in the 21W.770 Advanced Fiction Workshop in Spring 2017 with Professor Helen Elaine Lee. She assigned The Buddha in the Attic by Julie Otsuka. It's really interesting because it uses "we" as a narrative perspective. It's all about these Japanese women who migrate over to America right before WWII. They're in this era where there's a lot of anti-Asian sentiment. Near the climax of the book, there's the bombing and people start vanishing because of Japanese internment. I was really inspired by that book. But I'm not Japanese American — I'm Chinese American — so I thought it would be closer to my roots and more authentic if I wrote from the perspective of a Chinese American. And even now there's a lot of anti-Japanese sentiment within Chinese culture and the Chinese community, where I grew up hearing about how terrible the Japanese were because of WWII. That was something I really wanted to explore within the story.

There was this scene in The Buddha in the Attic where these Japanese American boys wore "I Am Chinese" pins just to joke around because they thought it was funny that people couldn't even tell the difference between Japanese and Chinese people. But Chinese Americans also wore these pins to protect themselves from hate crimes. It was a moment that stood out to me, and that's what created the opening scene in "The Art of Acceptance" where the parrator goes over to this boy's house, and even though she's in Chinatown where it's supposed to be a safe space for Chinese Americans, she still has to wear this pin when she goes outside.

TT: Since we're talking about race and ethnicity, do you think your own identity informs your perspective when you write

Wang: I'm pretty sure all the narrators are of Chinese descent. That was really important to me. When I first started out seriously writing at 9 or 10 years old, my main characters were always white, because everyone in the books I was reading was white. I didn't know that Asian Americans or people who looked like me could be heroes of the story. That was something that was really important to me, to write stories in which Chinese or Chinese American people could be the heroes of their own stories.

TT: Was there a choice to have a recurring theme throughout all the stories? Discomfort with identity seemed to be a running theme, but how did you view your work?

Wang: I didn't write any of these stories except for "Style" intending that they would be part of any collection. Most of the stories I wrote in 2017 or 2018 in a fiction writing class at MIT, or while doing this workshop with a literary magazine, or for myself for fun. I do think there are similar themes throughout the stories because I feel like I end up writing about whatever's on my mind at the moment.

For example, in "The Evolution of Wings," we have this character who is in arrested development. She can't grow up, and all the people around her were turning into birds. I wrote that in January 2017, right after my freshman fall semester at MIT. I felt pretty lost and I felt like everyone around me was blooming and growing and turning into these people that college is supposed to be about, and I felt like I wasn't getting there.

TT: There was also a story about painting called "Wu Daozi Dreaming" where you brought in mythology. I was wondering how you decided to pick this story.

Wang: When I was reading [about Wu aozi], as an artist, I really liked creating something that breaks the fourth wall or closes the distance between fiction and reality. It was super fun to write about and I thought there was a lot of beauty in the idea.

In the story that I write, he's forced to paint this magical place but then when he paints it, he is sort of physically abused, and he's forced to do it. I really like that comeuppance and the idea of how we can never really imitate reality, and I feel like in writing and in poetry and in painting — all of these are ways of us trying to understand who we are and translate our mind into something others can understand. There's always this chasm where it's never truly possible, and I wanted to communicate that through a story.

#### TT: Do you have any writers or books that inspire you?

Wang: There's so many because technically everything I've ever read fed into it. "The Evolution of Wings" was inspired by this other story called "Town of Birds" which was published in the Kenyon Review. It's similar in some ways in that there's this motif of kids turning into birds, but it's also very different because the theme of that story is much more maternal.

"The Girl in the Rice Paddies" was inspired by "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World"by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He's an amazing writer — he won the Nobel Prize.

But I think that a lot of inspiration came from random stuff that happened. For example, I really liked K-pop when I was in 9th grade, so that came through in "Style."

#### TT: Do you feel that writing in general and your writing - is capable of enacting change?

I've received messages from people who said, "Your writing really helped me," and, "It was the first time I got to see a story about a queer, Asian American girl." I definitely grew up in a time where there was not a lot of writing about queer Asian American people, and that was really hard for me when I was trying to figure out my identity. It helps people feel sane, and I think that's a valid way in which it enacts change.

I'm also hoping that people who might can can read these stories and understand that those people can be the heroes of those stories as well. And I also hope people will have fun reading. I think it's a pretty fun collection. There are a few dark moments, but on the whole, it's fun.

Editor's note: Rona Wang '21 has written for The Tech but was not involved in creating this review except for being interviewed as the novelist. The interview has been edited and cut for clarity and length.



Rona Wang '21 published her debut short fiction collection, Cranesong.

**ADVICE** 

# For the lonely and lovelorn this Valentine's Day

#### Auntie Matter on love that 'pricks like thorn'

By Auntie Matter

If you have questions for Auntie Matter, please submit them at tinyurl.com/AskAuntieMatter. Questions have been edited for length, clarity, and content.

A wise MIT professor once told Auntie that the hardest part of human life is finding love. With that in mind, Auntie presents Valentine's Day selections about finding, and navigating, love.

Dear Auntie,

My boyfriend seems incapable of giving me compliments, and I don't know how to explain that I'd really appreciate the occasional nice thing said about me. The last time I brought this up, he wrote a neural net to generate compliments and then has a cron job send them to me every morning. I'm not sure how to tell him that AI-generated niceties aren't quite what I'm looking for. Please help.

— Digitally Distressed

Dear Distressed,

There are a few possibilities that could explain your boyfriend's behavior, all of which warrant a serious reconsideration of your relationship. The first is that your boyfriend is extremely clueless. Seemingly, this is the most innocuous explanation, but while clueless men may appear cute at first, buyer beware. One day your man looks like

a lovable dope; the next, he computerizes his compliments. While you may be able to get through to him, you should think about whether you want to put up with someone who is so lacking in good sense.

Another possibility is that your boyfriend has done this actively to hurt you. The action is so thoughtless that, while Auntie is usually a proponent of the old adage, "never attribute to malice what can be explained by incompetence," your boyfriend might actually have been ill-intentioned. This is MIT, however, so he's probably just clueless. Regardless, if you discover your boyfriend is actively trying to hurt you, you should break up with him.

A final option is that you ask for too many compliments, and your boyfriend is exhausted, the neural net being a form of cyber protest. From your question this does not seem to be the case, as you describe yourself as repeatedly ("the last time") asking for "occasional" compliments. However, you should ask your boyfriend if he feels this way. (Auntie leaves as an exercise for the reader the implications of the fact that Distressed has had to bring this issue up on multiple occasions.)

In any case, you will have to talk to your boyfriend about his motivations, and how his behavior has affected you. You should try both to communicate your feelings and understand his. While Auntie is skeptical, he may be able to explain himself. Your re-

lationship admittedly looks dubious from this letter, but perhaps you will be satisfied with the resolution to this conflict. Auntie wishes you good luck with your dumb boyfriend.

Dear Auntie Matter,

I'm a junior, and I feel really lonely. I've gone on a bunch of dates, and I'm on Tinder, but nothing sticks. I never feel the spark with any girls I go out with. When I do really like someone, she is never into me. I want to find a girlfriend, but I'm losing hope. What am I doing wrong? All my friends have or have had girlfriends, and I feel like I'm behind the

— Looking for Love

Dear Looking,

Your letter gives few hints as to the cause of your dating problems, so Auntie will speculate on a range of possible causes and offer some solutions.

You might be emotionally unavailable—either not willing to open up to your dates or hung up on something (another woman, a situation in your past, etc.). You might not have clear or realistic expectations, either for the women you are seeing or the dates themselves. If any of these are the case, you'll want to do some self-reflection. Think about whether you are being held back by old baggage, or whether you are trying to fit your dates into boxes before you meet them.

You might just be awkward around women. You wouldn't be the first awkward MIT guy. (Trust Auntie, she knows.) And aside from general awkwardness, you might have poor hygiene, lack of etiquette knowledge, or other problems that make dating difficult.

Auntie has a concrete solution for awkwardness/poor hygiene/lack of etiquette: make friends with more women. There are many benefits - women can help you analyze your dating problems, and they can set you up with other women. Interacting with women will help alleviate any awkwardness you have around them. However, two caveats — first, if you want to date a woman, just ask her out. Do not start a friendship in the hope that she will someday want to date you. Second, you should not intend to use these women: make friends with them because you like them as people and want to be a good friend to them. Then, when you have a genuine friendship, you can ask for help, as friends ought to do.

Lastly, you might simply be unlucky. It's not always easy to find someone you like who also likes you. In this case and in any case, you must simply keep going. Be brave and patient in your pursuit of love.

If you really want love, Auntie, as always, believes you will find it. Your yearning for love is charming and human and valuable — while it may be painful, cherish it.

CAMPUS LIFE CAMP



### **Parrot**

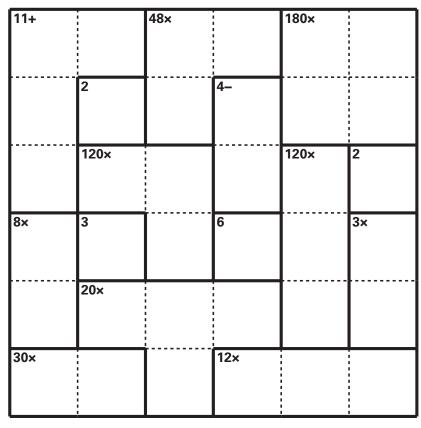
Solution, page 3

		9			6			5
		1	4		5	6	3	2
4						9	1	
					1		5	
		7		3		8		
	4		9					
	7	3						8
8	6	4	5		3	1		
1			7			2		

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column, row, and 3 by 3 grid contains exactly one of each of the digits 1 through 9.

### **Albatross**

Solution, page 3



Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column and row contains exactly one of each of the numbers 1-4. Follow the mathematical operations for each box.

### At the wedding by Brad Wilber

Solution, page 3

#### **ACROSS**

- 1 Tax return experts: Abbr.
- 5 Optimistic
- 9 Untidy room
- 13 Lends a hand
- 15 Initial poker payment
- 16 Egg-shaped
- 17 Three-legged stand
- 18 Hammer target
- 19 Spreadsheet numbers 20 Wedding's young tosser
- of petals
- 22 Spruce up, as prose
- 23 Person who is looking
- 24 Small valleys
- 25 "Red" shellfish serving
- 29 Red vegetable
- 31 Does nothing 32 Church wedding's official
- 36 Cow sounds
- 37 Fry lightly
- 39 Plant with a soothing gel
- 40 Wedding's keyboard player
- 42 \_\_ says (kids' game)
- 43 Abbey resident

- 44 Patches attached with steam
- 46 Jobs for detectives
- 49 Snooty one
- 50 Without a warranty
- 51 Wedding's
- pillow carrier
- 57 Beverage
- stored in
- cellars 58 A Great Lake
- 59 Angry
- 60 Sharp part of a knife 61 Competes at an auction
- 62 Bigwig in business
- 63 Homeowner's document
- 64 "I'd hate to break up \_\_\_ 65 Aide: Abbr.

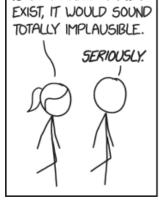
#### **DOWN**

- 1 "Gourmet" cook
- 2 Ring, as church bells
- 3 In addition
- 4 Gush like a volcano
- 5 Officer in a forest
- 6 Walking \_\_ (very happy)

- 7 Mix with a spoon
- 8 Shout
- 9 Locomotive on toy tracks
- 10 Avert or elude
- 11 Wedding gown fabric
- 12 Venetian-blind pieces
- 14 Rains in icy pellets
- 21 Sandwich bread
- 24 "That's amazing!" 25 Car rented for weddings
- 26 Aroma
- 27 Online diary
- 28 Burger bun tidbit 29 Make a wager
- 30 Adam's spouse
- 32 Monotonous routine 33 Ticklish red Muppet
- 34 Midday
- 35 Caves for bears
- 37 Do wrong
- 38 Pose a question 41 Phone listings: Abbr.
- 42 "Amen!"
- 44 Consume, as food
- 45 Steal from
- 46 Made crow sounds
- 15 18 19 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 33 34 35 36 40 44 | 45 46 47 48 50 58 60 62
- 47 "All kidding \_\_ . . . "
- 48 Scorch slightly
- 49 Sarcastic, as remarks
- 51 Country singer McEntire 52 Part of the eye
- 53 Operatic solo
- 54 Long-tailed rodents 55 When planes are
- expected: Abbr.
- 56 Tenant's payment

#### [2102] Internet Archive

A WEBCOMIC OF ROMANCE, SARCASM, MATH, AND LANGUAGE by Randall Munroe



THE INTERNET ARCHIVE

IS 50 WEIRD. IF IT DIDN'T

DO YOU EVER WORRY ABOUT HOW RELIANT WE ARE ON SYSTEMS THAT SOMEONE HAPPENS TO MAINTAIN FOR SOME REASON BUT WHICH COULD DISAPPEAR AT ANY TIME?



YEAH-THE SAME THING FREAKS ME OUT ABOUT HAVING A BODY. I KNOW, RIGHT?? I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HALF THESE PARTS DO! AND YET IF THEY STOP, WE DIE! PROBABLY BEST NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT.

The fact that things like the npm left-pad incident are so rare is oddly reassuring.



### "Hang those who kill cows" Subramanian Swamy

MIT is providing a platform to Subramanian Swamy an Islamophobic, Homophobic and Racist political operative from India who has made a career out of demonizing and vilifying marginalized communities especially religious and sexual minorities.

### THIS AFTER

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#### A.M. Turing Award Panel

Welcome by Anantha P. Chandrakasan Opening Remarks and Panel Moderation by Daniela Rus

Wednesday, February 27 5:30–7:00 pm

Kresge Auditorium, Building W16

Reception to Follow

Shafi Goldwasser, RSA

Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at MIT

**Butler Lampson,** Technical Fellow, Microsoft Corporation; Adjunct Professor of Computer Science at MIT

**Barbara Liskov,** Institute Professor at MIT

Silvio Micali, Ford Professor of Engineering at MIT Ronald Rivest, Institute Professor at MIT Michael Stonebraker, CTO,

Paradigm4; CTO, Tamr Inc.; Adjunct Professor of Computer Science at MIT Online:

helloworld.mit.edu #MITComputing

# Hello World, Hello MIT.

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